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NATO'S CAPABILITIES IN PERSPECTIVE

ANNCR:

MUCH HAS BEEN SAID IN RECENT WEEKS ABOUT THE STRENGTHENING OF WARSAW PACT FORCES IN EUROPE. AT THE SAME TIME, DOUBTS HAVE BEEN RAISED ABOUT NATO'S CAPABILITY TO WITHSTAND A SUDDEN MASSIVE SOVIET ATTACK. VOA NEWS ANALYST JOHN ALBERT HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS.

VOICE:

SPOKESMEN FOR THE OUTGOING FORD-ADMINISTRATION AS WELL AS PRESIDENT-ELECT JIMMY CARTER HAVE POINTED TO THE CONTINUING BUILDUP OF WARSAW PACT FORCES IN EUROPE AND THE NEED FOR NATO TO MAINTAIN ITS ADEQUATE STRENGTH TO DETER ANY POSSIBLE AGGRESSION AGAINST WESTERN EUROPE. BUT, AS SERIOUSLY AS WESTERN STATESMEN TAKE THIS SOVIET BUILDUP, IT IS MISLEADING, THOUGH, FASHIONABLE, SOLELY TO EMPHASIZE THE EXISTING WEAKNESSES AND SHORTCOMINGS OF THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE.

THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT ABOUT PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR NATO IN THE UNITED STATES AS WELL AS IN WESTERN EUROPE. A SURVEY BY POTOMAC ASSOCIATES, A NONPARTISAN PUBLIC POLICY RESEARCH ORGANIZATION IN WASHINGTON, SHOWS THAT THE PROPORTION OF AMERICANS FAVORING THE UNITED STATES COMING TO THE DEFENSE OF ITS MAJOR EUROPEAN ALLIES IN THE EVENT OF SOVIET ATTACK ROSE FROM FORTY-EIGHT PER CENT IN 1975 TO FIFTY-SIX PER CENT IN 1976.

PRESIDENT-ELECT CARTER, IN POSITION PAPERS BEFORE THE ELECTION AND INTERVIEWS GIVEN TO WEST EUROPEAN PUBLICATIONS, STRESSED THE NEED FOR A REVITALIZED NATO THROUGH REORGANIZATION OF ITS FORCE STRUCTURE AND GREATER STANDARDIZATION OF ITS

WEAPONS. AND THE INCREASED BUDGET PROVISIONS FOR THE AMERICAN ROLE IN NATO BY THE FORD-ADMINISTRATION GO IN THE SAME DIRECTION.

BUT THE EMPHASIS ON NATO'S NEEDS FOR THE FUTURE AND ITS WEAKNESSES WHICH HAVE TO BE OVERCOME, SHOULD NOT OBSCURE THE TREMENDOUS CAPABILITIES OF THE ALLIANCE WHICH, IN SECRETARY OF STATE KISSINGER'S WORDS, HAS IN RECENT YEARS GAINED IN STRENGTH AND COHESIVENESS AND HAS MOVED TOWARD A COMMON VISION OF WORLD PROBLEMS.

A NUMBER OF WESTERN STUDIES UNDERLINE THE BASIC SOUNDNESS AND STRENGTH OF NATO. THE 1975 REPORT BY THE LONDON-BASED INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES DISCUSSES THE EUROPEAN MILITARY BLANCE IN GREAT DETAIL. THE REPORT ACKNOWLEDGES THAT THE WARSAW PACT FORCES HAVE MORE TANKS AND AIRCRAFT IN THE REGION, WITH STANDARDIZED EQUIPMENT. BUT NATO, THE STUDY POINTS OUT, HAS SOME IMPORTANT QUALITATIVE ADVANTAGES, SUCH AS SOPHISTICATED AIRCRAFT AND ASSOCIATED WEAPON SYSTEMS AND CREW TRAINING. IT ALSO HAS BETTER TANKS, MORE HEAVY ANTI-TANK WEAPONS AND HAS GREATER OVERALL RESOURCES. THE REPORT CONCLUDES WITH THIS ASSESSMENT: "OVERALL, THE BALANCE IS CONSIDERED SUCH AS TO MAKE MILITARY AGGRESSION UNATTRACTIVE. THE CONSEQUENCES FOR AN ATTACKER WOULD BE INCALCULABLE, AND THE RISKS, INCLUDING THAT OF NUCLEAR ESCALATION, MUST IMPOSE CAUTION." BUT THE STUDY WARNS THAT THE BALANCE HAS MOVED AGAINST THE WEST OVER THE YEARS, AND NATO'S QUALITATIVE EDGE COULD BE ERODED IN THE FUTURE IF ADEQUATE DEFENSE SPENDING IS NOT MAINTAINED.

JS/RCS